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TO WHITE HOUSE IMMEDIATE

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FOR DR. BRZEZINSKI ONLY

FOL RPT JIDDA 4354 ACTION SECSTATE 20 JUN 77 QUOTE

S E C R E T JIDDA 4354

NODIS

E.O. 11652: GDS

TAGS: MARR, IR, SA

SUBJECT: SHAH'S COMMENTS ON CONTINGENCY PLANS FOR SAUDI ARABIA

REF: TEHRAN 5359

1. OVER THE YEARS THE SHAH HAS DEMONSTRATED AN ALMOST MORBID INTEREST IN THE STABILITY OF THE SAUDI REGIME. HIS COMMENTS ARE ALWAYS INTERESTING, SOMETIMES AMUSING. HE DOES NOT APPEAR TO BE VERY WELL INFORMED ON THE SUBJECT. PERHAPS HIS VIEWS ARE STILL COLORED BY THE INTENSE DISLIKE HE FELT TOWARDS THE LATE KING FAISAL. IT IS POSSIBLE ALSO THAT HE (LIKE HUSSEIN OF JORDAN) LOOKS AT THE SAUDI ROYAL FAMILY IN TERMS OF HIS OWN VERY DIFFERENT DYNASTIC SITUATION.

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2. AS THE RAPID AND SMOOTH TRANSITION AFTER THE ASSASSINATION OF FAISAL DEMONSTRATED, THE SAUDI REGIME HAS SOLID UNDERPINNINGS AND A GOOD GRASP ON THE REINS OF POWER. THERE IS NO QADHAFI EVEN DIMLY ON THE HORIZON. CONDITIONS IN THE KINGDOM ARE VASTLY DIFFERENT FROM THOSE OF LIBYA AT THE TIME OF THE COUP, ESPECIALLY WITH REGARD TO THAT ALL-IMPORTANT

FACTOR, THE STRENGTH, BREADTH AND RESOLUTION OF THE ROYAL FAMILY. I SERVED IN LIBYA AND WAS DESK OFFICER AT THE TIME OF THE COUP AND HAVE REFLECTED OFTEN ON HOW DIFFERENT THE TWO SITUATIONS ARE. AS IT IS, WE THINK THE PROSPECTS FOR THE NEXT TRANSITION WHEN IT COMES ARE AS FAVORABLE AS THEY WERE FOR THE LAST.

3. WE HAVE BEEN CONCERNED BY AND HAVE BEEN REPORTING ON CONDITIONS ARISING FROM FROM THE KINGDOM'S SUDDEN GREAT WEALTH (CORRUPTION, INFLATION, SOCIAL DISLOCATION, ETC.) WHICH MIGHT LEAD TO POLITICAL INSTABILITY. OUR PRESENT JUDGMENT IS THAT THE GOVERNMENT AND THE POSITION OF THE HOUSE OF SAUD ARE STRONGER THAN THEY WERE TWO YEARS AGO WHEN THE ECONOMY SHOWED SIGNS OF RUNNING OUT OF CONTROL. WE SUGGEST THE DEPARTMENT LOOK AT THE EMBASSY'S ANNUAL POLICY ASSESSMENTS FROM 1973 TO THE PRESENT: ALL IN ALL, A REMARKABLY STEADY LINE.

4. ALL THE FOREGOING IS PRELUDE TO THE MORE IMPORTANT ISSUE OF A CONTINGENCY PLAN FOR SAUDI ARABIA WHICH INVOLVES IRANIAN MILITARY FORCES. THE QUESTIONS THIS RAISES ARE MYRIAD AND DISTURBING. THE SHAH IS ABSOLUTELY CORRECT, OF COURSE, IN THE IMPORTANCE HE ASCRIBES TO A PRO-WESTERN GOVERNMENT IN SAUDI ARABIA. SOMETHING OVER TWO YEARS AGO OUR FORMER AMBASSADOR IN JIDDA WAS SUFFICIENTLY WORRIED ABOUT THE POSSIBLE DESTABILIZING EFFECTS OF CORRUPTION
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THAT HE RECOMMENDED TO THE DEPARTMENT THE FORMULATION OF CONTINGENCY PLANS FOR PROPPING UP THE HOUSE OF SAUD IF IT WERE CHALLENGED. AMBASSADOR AKINS HAD SUCH MISGIVINGS ABOUT HIS RECOMMENDATION, THAT HE INSTRUCTED THOSE OF THE COUNTRY TEAM WHO DISAGREED WITH HIM TO WRITE DOWN THEIR DEMURS WHICH HE THEN TRANSMITTED TO THE DEPARTMENT.

5. AT NO TIME WAS IT SUGGESTED THAT IT WOULD BE POSSIBLE TO USE THE SHAH TO PROP UP A TOTTERING SAUDI REGIME. HAD WE CONSIDERED IT THEN, OUR JUDGMENT WOULD HAVE BEEN AS IT IS NOW THAT IT CANNOT BE DONE. NO SAUDI COULD RETAIN ANY SUPPORT FROM HIS OWN PEOPLE IF HE TURNED TO THE PERSIANS FOR HELP AGAINST FELLOW COUNTRYMEN. NOTHING COULD BE BETTER CALCULATED TO RALLY THE SAUDIS BEHIND A USURPER.

6. IN THE UNLIKELY EVENT OF A SUCCESSFUL COUP, WE DOUBT WHETHER IRANIAN FORCES COULD SEIZE ALL OR PART OF THE OIL FIELDS AND PRODUCTION FACILITIES INTACT. BUT THIS IS A MATTER WE ULTIMATELY LEAVE TO MILITARY EXPERTS. THE POLITICAL AND ECONOMIC CONSEQUENCES, HOWEVER, STRIKE US AS SO BAD THAT IT MUST CERTAINLY BE SAFER TO CONSIDER FIRST IF WE COULD DEAL WITH WHATEVER REGIME COMES TO POWER IN SAUDI

ARABIA. (E.G. DO WE WANT THE SHAH TO CONTROL THE PRODUCTION AND PRICE OF ALL THE OIL OF BOTH IRAN AND SAUDI ARABIA? HOW WOULD THE RUSSIANS REACT? ETC., ETC.)

7. EVEN BEYOND THE QUESTION OF THE PRACTICALITY OF CONTINGENCY PLANNING FOR SAUDI ARABIA INVOLVING IRAN IS THE MATTER OF WHAT WE DO WHEN WE EVEN DISCUSS THE MATTER WITH THE SHAH. CAN HE TAKE SERIOUSLY OUR PROTESTATIONS THAT HE IS PUSHING THE PRICE OF OIL TOO HIGH WHEN HE KNOWS THAT WE ARE LOOKING TO HIM TO SEE THAT SAUDI OIL REMAINS AVAILABLE FOR THE LAMPS OF THE WORLD? WOULD HE NOT BE FULLY JUSTIFIED IN HIS PIQUE OR ANGER AT BEING DENIED AN ITEM OF NEW MILITARY HARDWARE WHEN HE IS EXPECTED TO USE HIS ARMED FORCES AS THE US DIRECTS? AND WHY SHOULD HE BE FOREBEARING AND
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COMPROMISING IN MATTERS OF SECURITY IN THE GULF AREA WHEN WE, THE US, HAVE ACKNOWLEDGED HIS PRIMACY AND EVEN HIS RIGHT TO USE HIS ARMED FORCES TO PRESERVE "SECURITY"?

8. IN SUM WE THINK IT DANGEROUS AND PROBABLY HARMFUL EVEN TO DISCUSS CONTINGENCY PLANS FOR SAUDI ARABIA WITH THE SHAH. I RECOMMEND THAT WE NOT REPLY IN ANY WAY TO THE SHAH'S QUERY. IF HE RAISES THE MATTER AGAIN MIGHT WE TELL HIM THAT THE ADMINISTRATION KNOWS NOTHING OF SUCH DISCUSSIONS THAT MAY HAVE TAKEN PLACE, COULD NOT FAVOR SUCH A DISPOSITION OF IRANIAN FORCES, AND DOES NOT SEE A LIKELY NEED FOR THEIR DEPLOYMENT. (I BELIEVE SIMILAR DISCUSSIONS MAY HAVE TAKEN PLACE ALSO WITH KING HUSSEIN OF JORDAN, BUT TEHRAN'S REFTEL -- APART FROM MR. EHRLICH'S BOOK -- WAS THE FIRST I HAD HEARD ABOUT POSSIBLE UNDERSTANDINGS WITH THE SHAH.)

9. DEPT PLEASE SHOW THIS MESSAGE TO AMBASSADOR WEST. COULD IT ALSO BE PASSED TO EMBASSY TEHRAN (AND OTHER ADDRESSEES IF DESIRED).
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